



Volume XVI

RALEIGH, N. C., TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1898.

Number 7.

CAPITOL AT WASHINGTON BLOWN UP

At 5:20 O'clock on Sunday Afternoon.

SUPREME COURT ROOM DESTROYED

Explosion Believed to be Due to a Leaking Gas Meter—Loss is Over a Million Dollars Including Many Valuable Books—The Havoc of Explosion and Flames—Previous Fires at the Capitol—Firemen Stunned by a Second Explosion.

Washington, D. C., Nov. 8.—(Special.)—Like the eruption of a volcano came an explosion in the Capitol building this evening and until extras were issued to the leading morning papers, few people would believe the rumor that the Capitol was on fire.

The Supreme Court room and the rooms immediately adjoining on the main floor of the Capitol were totally wrecked by fire this evening. The money damage is extensive, but far more than that will be the loss to the Congressional Law Library. This Library was located directly beneath the Supreme Court room. It contained 20,000 volumes, and its value was estimated at over \$1,000,000. A great many of the volumes were destroyed by fire or the floods of water poured into the Capitol.

At 5:23 o'clock a heavy explosion, which was heard several blocks from the Capitol, took place, and immediately afterwards flames burst from the windows of the Congressional Law Library in the basement, and a few moments later from the Supreme Court room.

An alarm of fire was turned in, quickly followed by a general alarm, and the entire fire departments responded.

The man who first sounded the alarm was near the Senate wing on the main floor when the explosion took place. By the time he reached the Supreme Court room in an endeavor to locate the fire, the corridors were filled with smoke, and he was compelled to seek the fresh air. By the time the fire department was at work rigging up ladders it was found impossible to get anywhere near the Supreme Court room where the fire seemed to be hottest and smoke and flames poured from the windows.

The fire is believed to have resulted from a gas explosion, caused by a leakage of the meter, right by the elevator shaft in the corridor leading to the law library from the rotunda. Assistant Engineer Prescott, of the Senate, was seen there was a gas meter, he said, four feet in diameter, located below the Supreme Court chamber. Then attendants are in the habit of having a gas jet burning in the corridor, so that they may be able to find their way through in the morning. As the place is very dark, this gas meter, Mr. Prescott believes, was leaking, and the gas ignited at the jet. He said that he had definitely ascertained that it was the meter which had exploded. It was at this point that the boiler connected with the apparatus that heats the Supreme Court room had exploded. This boiler was in good condition, and there was no other boiler in that part of the building.

As soon as Chief Parris reached the scene, he directed that ladders be erected at each of the windows. Six streams of water were speedily turned into the Capitol. The flames at that time were bursting from the basement windows and from the windows of the second floor. Windows were crashed outward with the heat, but the firemen went to work at once. Owing to the fact that the walls of the building are of masonry, the fire had nothing but the wood work of furniture fittings to feed on, and was soon extinguished in the upper floors. In

the basement there was a roaring volcano of flames, which leaped through the great orifice in the main corridor of the building at the basement floor. This seemed to be fed by gas, for though it promptly yielded to the stream of water turned on it, it would soon break out again if the water was taken away. It was in one of those outbreaks that the fire darted through the basement floor, an attacked the Consultation Chamber of the Justices, on the first floor of the building. This was discovered by the engineer of the building, who got out their own hose and extinguished it; not however, until all the fittings of the room had been destroyed. There is little reason to believe that any of the important documents of the court have been injured. The clerk's office was not touched by the explosion or by the flames, and in that room are all the more valuable papers of the court. They are not all in fire proof safes, however, and it is merely a happy chance that has prevented the destruction of irreplaceable documents, in which the decisions of the first court of the country rest. The office of the Marshal of Supreme Court suffered most. The floor was completely blown out of his room, and the great masses of masonry torn from the floor were hurled with such force to the ceiling, that they burst the stone and plaster of the vault above them and tossed the ponderous flagstones of the upper passage many feet from their resting place. Much of the damage to walls and ceilings was confined to corridors, but the chamber where the Supreme Court sits was badly wrecked, too. Along one side of it is the elevator used by the Justices, and it was through this shaft that the flames followed the flying rocks and plaster of the explosion. Part of the floor of the chamber suffered from the explosion, and the fire destroyed the furnishings of the room.

The Marshal's office is just to the south of the chamber. On the floor below is the consultation chamber, and when Librarian Clark arrived shortly after the explosion, he was prepared to have the sittings of the court take place in the room until the damage done by the fire could be repaired. Fifteen minutes later this consultation chamber was entirely wrecked by fire, which unexpectedly broke out from the main shaft made by the explosion. The explosion, it appears at this time, took place in an engine room in the sub-basement beneath the Law Library, and the force was such that it tore up the floor of that room, and also partially destroyed the floor of the Supreme Court room. It caused such a break in the floors that the flames had a clean and swift draught to the roof the Supreme Court room. The fire spread rapidly and it was but a few minutes before the Law Library and the Supreme Court room were a mass of flames. Some of the watchmen found their way through the stifling atmosphere to the basement floor, where the explosion occurred.

When the scene of the explosion was reached it was found that a wooden trap door had been torn off by the explosion and around the entrance to the elevator shaft were several marks of a violent

concussion on the walls. Part of the cement was torn and the walls were cracked. Lieutenant Robert L. Ackers, of the Capitol Police, said that he was sitting in his chair in an adjoining room when the explosion occurred. It happened at 5:20, he said. The explosion knocked him out of his chair, and as he rushed out he saw the demolition in the rotunda and in the entrance way to the Supreme Court room. Thomas P. America, an engineer in the electric light department of the building, was in the sub-basement of the Senate wing when the crash of the explosion shook the very ground upon which he stood. Running rapidly in the direction from which the report had come, he saw heavy flagging of the floor and solid masonry of the arches of Crypt shattered. From the observations made by America the explosion took place in a small passage way leading to the room in which the heating apparatus of the Supreme Court is located. The elevator shaft had been wrecked and through the ceiling above the passage he could see the wide gap made in the heavy ceiling by the explosion. Fire had already started, and was licking the woodwork of the elevator shaft. America ran to the main hall and notified Orris Akers, one of the Capitol policemen, who immediately turned in an alarm to fire department headquarters. From that office a general alarm was sent out, and all the engines and other fire department apparatus of the city responded. The East front of the Capitol, from the main central stairway to the small wing, was ablaze when the engines arrived. No one was near the scene of the explosion at the time it occurred. This part of the building is visited but infrequently. The sound of the explosion was heard distinctly far up in the city.

Thousands heard of the explosion by 8 o'clock, and congregations leaving the many churches heard the news and rushed to the scene of disaster. The spectators were kept in a wide circle about the North portion of the center of the building, but they were allowed on the stairway to the North, where a huge crowd gathered. The main centre stairway was kept free, and the flames which came out of the doors to the rotunda soon became so thick that no one could be allowed close by. There was scarcely any fire visible except the few flames leaping out of the windows. By the time the crowd had congregated, it was dark, and without the illuminations of big flames, the working of the fire department was not easily seen by the spectators.

No one who visited the scene will ever forget the picture presented. The beautiful marble and stone structure belching forth volumes of smoke. To-night I was among the thousands who watched the heroic work of Washington's firemen and later went into the building as far as any one was allowed to enter.

The work of the Supreme Court will not be delayed a day, it is thought, but it will be many months before the mangled portion of the building can be reconstructed.

No life was lost, but the government

is the loser to the amount of more than a million dollars, besides the invaluable Law Library of the Supreme Court, the equal of which is not to be found in the world.

The story of the fire and the demolition of a portion of the grandest building owned by the United States, should be an interesting one.

THE HAVOC WROUGHT.

Flames and destruction know no sentiment, and the historic old Supreme Court chamber, which has been the meeting place of the most eminent pro-pounders of jurisprudence, went before them. The upheaval of the explosion, which drove outward and upward everything within its scope, brought destruction and ruin to volumes and statuary, many of which can never be replaced.

Arranged on small pedestals around the Supreme Court chamber were busts of Chief Justice Marshall and a dozen other distinguished representatives of the legal profession, who did much toward establishing and promulgating the legal precedents of the country. In the smoke and ruin which followed the explosion, these valuable pieces of statuary were either partially or wholly destroyed, and with their destruction the country has suffered an irreparable loss. They were valuable beyond all computation in dollars and cents, and they have been the treasured exhibits of the Supreme Court chamber some of them for half a century. Below the Supreme Court Chamber is the Law Library, a collection of 75,000 volumes, many of them legal books of rare value, and a large percentage of the volumes are of a character that cannot be replaced. This collection of books is estimated to be of the value of \$1,000,000, for such of these as might be obtainable, but as stated the intrinsic value of the library is beyond estimation. The full extent of the damage to the Law Library cannot be estimated even in the present condition of the rooms. There is another valuable collection of books in the consultation chamber of the Supreme Court which also suffered great damage. The rooms comprising the consultation chamber are just across a narrow corridor from the Supreme Court room, and here more than 10,000 volumes were stored. The rooms nearest the Supreme Court chamber were damaged to the greatest extent. They were situated almost directly over the spot where the explosion occurred, and the flames had soon spread to all sides. The two adjoining rooms were immediately closed from the first, and save for smoke and what water found its way into these rooms the damage is but slight.

THE WORK OF THE FIREMEN.

During the fire at the Capitol to-night, the firemen, in their efforts to get into the corridor with their hose, proceeded to break a hole through the masonry. While they were thus at work, there was a second upheaval, caused, it is believed, by the further accumulations of gas, and some of the firemen were stunned. It was at first thought that they were injured, but all of them quickly recovered. A

hole two feet wide was then made and the hose inserted. On the outside the masonry had bulged out in some places as much as two inches. The flooring in the vicinity of the explosion was a complete wreck. A door fifty feet from the gas meter, on the West side, had been thrown off its hinges, and flew over the parking. Inside the corridor there were several places at which the masonry had bulged out over a foot.

PREVIOUS FIRES.

The Capitol building has been damaged a number of times before by fire, but it is believed that the latest fire will prove to be the most disastrous in the history of the building. On two occasions prior to this, fires have originated from explosions of gas. Seventeen years ago a large amount of damage was done to the same part of the building by an explosion of this kind, and in 1876, there was an explosion of gas that killed one man and came near killing another. The scene of this explosion was in the narrow hall to the north part of the building, and where the Senate wing adjoins the main building. This explosion killed John King, who was head carpenter of the building, and whose body was blown against the wall with such force as to leave an impression at that point which was only obliterated by reconstruction of the wall. During the past summer, \$22,000 has been expended in renovating and making alterations in the Supreme Court chamber. The chamber had been entirely cleaned and painted and new carpets placed on the floor.

NEW FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Washington, Nov. 2.—(Special.)—The critical situation of affairs between France and Great Britain is exciting lively interest among members of the diplomatic corps here, and on some of the phases of the controversy their information appears to be more exact than that coming from Paris and London. Despatches today attached much significance to the absence of Baron de Courcel, the French Ambassador, from London, and it was stated that France would show her animosity by not continuing an Ambassador at London.

The Journal Official received at the French embassy, however, says that the appointment of M. Paul Cambon as Ambassador to London, to succeed Baron de Courcel, was officially gazetted on September 21st. M. Cambon is a brother of M. Jules Cambon, the French Ambassador here, who was conspicuous in the peace negotiations between this Government and Spain. He has been Ambassador at Constantinople, and is now on his way from that point to London.

At the leading embassies here there is little idea that the Fashoda affair will lead to war, although there is very general opinion that the Egyptian question in general may lead to a conflict in which other European countries than France and Great Britain may take part.

THEY WILL KEEP THE PEACE.

An Arrangement Satisfactory to Both Parties on the Fashoda Question.

New York, Nov. 3.—The London correspondent of the Evening Post cables that a general and satisfactory arrangement has been reached between Great Britain and France on the Fashoda question.

RUSH OF WAR-LIKE PREPARATIONS

Gathering of British Emergency Squadron.

SUPPOSED SPY TAKEN

WAR SHIPS TAKING ON THEIR FULL STORES.

SIGNAL SERVICE MEN ORDERED HOME

Something Extraordinary, it is Declared, Seems to have Happened, and a Crisis Seems

Approaching. New French Cabinet Constituted.

London, October 31st.—There was an unexpected gloomy feeling this morning on the Stock Exchange and the Paris Bourse, both these markets being influenced, it is inferred, by the aggressive tone of some of the French papers. Besides this, something extraordinary seems to have happened, and it looks as if a crisis were approaching. The British naval preparations are certainly being pushed with great activity. The British emergency squadron is gathering at Davenport with all possible speed. Seven battleships and one cruiser have been thus far designated to join this squadron. Officers and sailors have been hurriedly recalled from leave of absence, and several battleships and cruisers at Portsmouth are taking their full stores on board, and other like preparations are being made. A number of signal men, now on duty in the British Channel squadron, which arrived at Gibraltar this morning, have been ordered home for services, it is presumed, on board the auxiliary cruisers, if the latter should be required for active service.

A sensation has been caused by the arrest this morning of a supposed Russian spy at a fort near Harwich. The man was already under surveillance, and went to a redoubt, where he tried to obtain some information from a sentry regarding the fortifications. He was promptly arrested, and inquiries are being made regarding his antecedents. It was also asserted today that the commanding officers of the London volunteer regiments have received orders to prepare for immediate mobilization, and it was declared that the different artillery corps had been informed as to the forts on the southern and eastern coasts to which they have been allotted.

The Pall Mall Gazette this afternoon says:

"England has been, and even now is, so near war that the Government has carried on its preparations to the farthest limit of the preparatory stage. It has been arranged to call out the reserves and militia, and to mobilize the volunteers simultaneously, and to form large camps at various important railroad junctions, where rolling stock and locomotives will be concentrated."

THE NEW FRENCH CABINET.

Paris, October 31.—The new Cabinet is constituted as follows: M. Lebrat, Minister of Justice; M. Dupuy, Premier and Minister of the Interior; M. DeFreycinet, Minister of War; M. Lockroy, Minister of Marine; M. Deleassé, Minister of Foreign Affairs; M. Petrayal, Minister of Finance; M. Leygues, Minister of Public Instruction; M. Deloncle, Minister of Commerce; M. Guillaumet, Minister of the Colonies; M. Viger, Minister of Agriculture; M. Krantz, Minister of Public Works.

WILL THE CZAR SEIZE NEW CHANG

Wei Hai Wei, Nov. 2.—All the British warships here, the first-class battleship Centurion, the first-class cruiser Narcius, the second-class cruiser Heron, the torpedo boat destroyer Whiting, the torpedo boat destroyer Fame, the torpedo boat destroyer Handy, and the first-class gunboat Peaceock, have cleared for action and are ready for sea at an hour's notice.

The first-class battleship Victorious and the first-class cruiser Undaunted, at Che Foo, are coaling to their fullest capacity.

The greatest secrecy is maintained as to the meaning of these warlike preparations, but there is no doubt important instructions are expected at any moment.

RUSSIA'S PROBABLE AIM.

London, Nov. 2.—The dispatch from Wei Hai Wei announcing the war preparations of the British naval authorities there, is regarded here as being of grave importance, coupled with the French Anglo war preparations. It is surmised that Russia, profiting by the present strained relations between Great Britain and France, has decided to push forward her aims in the Far East by forcibly seizing the valuable treaty port of New Chang, which Great Britain cannot permit, it is said.

PREPARED TO FIGHT.

Wei Hai Wei, Nov. 3.—All the British warships here are now fully coaled. Their woodwork has been removed and they are completely prepared for emergencies.